

Fun in Iraq

Story by

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Picture this. You're a paratrooper in a foreign country at war; away from everyone one you've ever loved or cared about. The land you're used to, the land of the big PX is only a distant memory. The only link to the real world is bits of news clippings you can read out of a week old Stars and Stripes. For the first time in months you finally get a few hours to yourself at night for personal time. What do you do?

The 173^d Airborne Brigade is trying help soldiers answer that question. So far the 173d has come up with many solutions.

1st Sgt. Lauro Obeada, Combat Support Company, 173d Airborne Brigade, organized and coaches the Sky Soldier soccer team. Sky Soldiers play local Iraqi teams in different areas of Northern Iraq. Most games start at 6 p.m. Friday and paratroopers can hitch a ride on CSC's shuttle bus at the Sky Soldiers movie theater at 4 p.m. For paratroops that just want to kick back and relax and enjoy a good movie, 173d's got them covered.

"When I get off work I really don't want to put on my IBA (Interceptor Body Armor) and go watch a soccer game," Spc. Edwin Laboy said. "I just want to hangout with some friends and watch movies."

"Major Chambers spotted the old Iraqi theater one day and came up with idea for a Sky Soldier theater," said Sgt. Rebecca Sport, HHC, 173d Abn Bde's S-1 non-commissioned officer in charge. Movies show twice a day to coincide with day shift and night shift.

Paratroopers trying to beat the sweltering temperatures that average around 105-115 degrees in Kirkuk, can enjoy a swim in the joint Air Force/Sky Soldier pool.

Another choice for paratroopers is the gym. When Iraqi soldiers left Kirkuk Military Airfield they left behind a nice gym, which contained a full size basketball court and a weight room.

Some paratroopers have there own idea of fun and relaxation.

When 1st Lt. John McDougall, executive officer for Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, takes some personal time he can usually be heard a ½ a mile away. McDougall is a bagpipe player.

McDougall can usually be heard playing on a balcony over looking a Baath party compound in Charlie Companies sector in downtown Kirkuk, Iraq.

"It just makes sense," said McDougall. "Bagpipes and soldiers go back as far as William Wallace and Brave Heart. So there inseparable."

McDougall has recently had the honor of playing his bagpipes at a memorial service for fallen paratroopers.

No matter how bored you are, there is always something to do here," said Laboy. "You just have to make the effort to find out."